



View from the Blackdown Hills

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Issue 80 June 2011

It's your newspaper

*Keeping you in touch with news and events
in your Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*

Fast action for super internet

By **LUCIE SIMIC**
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ACT now for superfast broadband in the Blackdown Hills.

Devon County Council and Somerset County Council are encouraging as many businesses and householders as possible to support a joint-bid for government funding for superfast and better broadband via Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK).

The case for investment was presented to Government on April 18th and has been followed up by a recent meeting with ministers.

It's estimated that over 75,000 businesses and households in Devon and Somerset have no, or very slow, access to the internet.

This has an adverse affect on business growth and competitiveness, especially in the rural communities within the Blackdown Hills.

In the past, countryside campaigners and Westcountry businesses had warned that slow broadband speeds in rural areas put them at a disadvantage and risked costing the economy hundreds of millions of pounds.

Linda Bennett, general manager of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership, said in a recent letter of support: "The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lacks many basic public services and these can only be found in the surrounding towns, thus requiring the use of private cars as public transport is also limited in the area.

"The provision of superfast broadband would provide improved and efficient access to many of these facilities,

and reduce the carbon footprint of the area, another objective of the AONB Management Plan.

"The provision of superfast broadband will make a significant contribution to meeting the objectives of the AONB as well as enhancing the economic and social wellbeing of its communities."

The Blackdown Hills Business Association is urging people to get the message out to as many people in the area as possible and to encourage them to take part in the survey.

Businesses willing to provide letters of endorsement to the project team, setting out why improved broadband will help in the future, should email them to economy@devon.gov.uk as soon as possible.

The survey can be found at www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk.

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are alive...**
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Villagers turn tide on closures with new shop

By **LUCIE SIMIC**
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IN a spirit harking back to the days of the Duke of Wellington and the popular uprisings of the Civil War, the residents of Churchinford in the Blackdown Hills have turned the tide on recent closures and opened their new community shop last month.

Churchinford used to have a village store but, like many rural communities, lost it when the Post Office service was reduced beyond viability. However, the residents of both Churchinford and nearby villages such as Bishopswood, Otterford and

Stapley have rallied round and created a new community shop next to the village hall called Churchinford and District Community Shop.

The new shop will sell a wide range of good quality staple goods plus selected local fare such as farm-reared meat and speciality foods. Fifty per cent of the good will be supplied by the Co-op, who gave the shop a small grant, and the other 50 per cent will be good from local suppliers.

The shop is entirely funded and run by the community and was officially opened by Councillor Ross Henley and Councillor John Thorne on Saturday, May 14th.

The new shop will be open seven days a

week from 8am to 12noon and 2pm to 6pm Monday to Friday, 8am to 12noon on Saturdays and 10am to 12noon on Sundays.

Chairman of the directors for the community shop, David Lowe, told *View from the Blackdown Hills* that the opening of the shop had gone very well.

He said: "We did a bumper trade on the first Saturday but we expect the good sales to continue as the shop is there to serve the community. What the community wants will be catered for and we hope to be around forever. The shop is going to be run entirely by volunteers and we hope that people will support this venture."



♦ **HEMYOCK Baptist Church's eighth annual Walk in the Blackdowns** attracted more than 60 participants on a gloriously sunny Easter Monday morning. The walk took place around Dunkeswell Abbey and Madford Valley, followed by lunch on return to the church

WORKING OUR WOODLANDS

Blackdown and East Devon
Woodland Association with
John Greenshields

AS a tree warden for my parish, I am responsible for keeping an eye out for any infringements of the law and report to the relevant authorities.

Last year, a parishioner and ardent walker informed me of some activity on a hedge on a footpath, on inspection it had been cut down to a couple of inches off the ground.

The 70 yards of damage was also on an ancient boundary. On asking the owner of the hedge what was happening he said it was his hedge and none of my business. The term removal also means cutting down and it is an offence. He was made to reinstate the hedge and was lucky to get away without a fine, but the old hedge is gone forever.

I hope to see readers at the Blackdowns Woodland Fair on July 2nd. There will be plenty to get involved in, let's hope the weather holds.

Felling has stopped now for the summer season, but we did haul out two large wind blow oaks the other day. We could only get them out in dry conditions. They will be used to restore a farm barn which was once clad in larch, all the internal timber is oak with sling-braced collar beam trusses. The restoration will take some time but it is hoped to return the barn to its former glory. While removing the oaks, we had to make a detour around a moor hens nest that had been constructed in a dried-up pond. I went back that night and put an electric fence around it to keep foxes and badgers away. We have a pond near the house and the other day the hens brought their three chicks to the safety of it. A good job done.

The Devon Rural Skills Trust is looking for a suitable candidate to train in rural crafts for 12 months, including hedge laying, stone walling and others. The aim of the charity is to ensure that those traditional skills don't die out, which are all important in forming our landscape as we see it today. They are currently looking for a new trainee to be based in Devon, there is no wage but all the training is free. The contact number is 01548 821156.

Given the dry conditions most trees and shrubs seem to be coping well, but let's hope for some rain soon otherwise I won't get any early spuds this year!

Email: parkfarm@tinyonline.co.uk

Contact the news team at blackdown@tindlenews.co.uk

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By **BEN MIDDLETON**
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A **CHARDSTOCK** charity has scooped a **£15,000** prize and the money will be used to fit out the village play area.

As previously reported in the *Pulman's View* newspaper series, Chardstock Park Trust had been competing in a nationwide competition to claim the funds that will be used to purchase equipment for the play area close to the community hall and new primary school.

The competition was organised by Robinsons Fruit Shoot Parents for Playgrounds. Since February this year the competition has asked parents to nominate and vote for the playground they would like to receive funding.

Chardstock Park Trust beat off competition from more than a 1,000 entries and made it to the final five.

And it was a good result for members of the trust as on Thursday, May 5th, they received the news that they had all been hoping for.

Carol Humphreys, who nominated Chardstock play ground in the Robinsons competition, said: "We are so excited to have won the Parents for Playgrounds bursary. The £15,000 bursary is going to make such a massive difference to our local playground and to all the kids that play there."

"I really can't wait to hear and see more on how the money is going to be put to good use."

Nadia Moussa, brand manager for Robinsons Fruit Shoot, added: "The Parents for Playgrounds campaign was designed to help parents preserve the important tradition of outdoor play for their children, so it's great to know that parents and kids are still passionate about their playgrounds."

"We want to give our winners a playground to be proud of because all parents and all children deserve a natural and safe place to play outside. We're looking forward to unveiling the playgrounds later in the year."



◆ **YOUNGSTERS** from Chardstock Primary School celebrate the news that Chardstock Park Trust has been awarded funds that will be used to buy equipment for Chardstock play area

Village play area scoops £15k cash

Parish council's farewell to Anne

By **ANDERS LARSSON**
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COUNCILLORS at Hemyock bid a sad farewell to their parish clerk, Anne Kingston, at the final council meeting ahead of the recent local elections.

Anne had held the post for 24 years and was retiring to spend more time in the garden and with the grand children.

Describing Anne as a "faithful and able servant of the community" Parish Chairman Heather Stallard thanked her for her "tireless service and exceptional local knowledge". Councillors presented her with a picture featuring a special favourite of Anne's – the owl.

At the same meeting three councillors stood down and were thanked for their service to the people of Hemyock: Rev Steven Reed, Paul Steed and Sally Cartledge.



◆ **FROM** left, Reverend Steven Reed, Lisa Clist, Roy Brooke, James Edwards, Heather Stallard, Richard Hart, Anne Kingston, Paul Steed, Ian McCulloch, Sally Cartledge, Frank Rosamond, Lance Povah

Saplings for school kids

PUPILS at a school near Chard school have been presented with 60 free saplings by Monkton Elm Garden and Pet Centre.

Rachael Auton, a teacher Buckland St Mary Church of England Primary School, explained: "We were lucky enough to benefit from the complimentary bulbs that the garden centre gave away last year and we are delighted to have received the free saplings too."

"The children love to be outside and anything that can enrich their environment is always a bonus."

"We are extremely grateful and will use these trees to brighten up our school and help maintain our environmentally-friendly site."

In January, Monkton Elm Garden and Pet Centre invited not-for-profit organisations that needed support for their conservation projects to apply for between 50 and 100 small saplings.



◆ **RACHAEL** Auton, Oak Class teacher at Buckland St Mary Church of England Primary School, left, receives the saplings from Sharon Michieli, plant advisor at Monkton Elm Garden and Pet Centre

SWP's disbelief in householder fines for home rubbish

SOMERSET Waste Partnership (SWP) says it has never believed in fining householders for waste transgressions.

The comment was made after reports that central government may restrict local councils' right to fine householders who, for example, fail to shut their waste bin.

SWP MD Steve Read said: "Our approach has always been about education and information not enforcement or fines."

"We have never fined a householder."

"I think most people in Somerset understand and support efforts to both raise recycling rates and cut the £8million or more of their

council taxes wasted on dumping rubbish in landfill, including the government tax that makes up nearly three quarters of the total landfill bill."

"Somerset has no 'bin police'. Our regular crews who collect bins, black sacks and recycling boxes keep a watch for problems and either let householders know or ask an advisor in our small operations team to get in touch."

"It is usually enough to leave behind a polite note to remind people about materials that can or cannot be recycled, for example."

"We have always felt this is the best way to remind residents how to operate the system, which is straightforward once people get into the swing of using it."

Community grants for projects in hills

ANYONE with an idea for a community project in the Blackdown Hills can ask for help from the Sustainable Development Fund, which is now open to applications for 2011-12.

The fund is administered by the Blackdown Hills Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) team. It awards grants of up to £5,000 to community groups, schools and small businesses for projects which benefit the area.

Blackdown Hills AONB manager Linda Bennett said: "We're delighted to be able to offer SDF grants again this year. Small amounts of funding can make all the difference in helping local people to get ideas off the ground and make real improvements to their communities and the environment."

Projects funded in the past include improvements to village facilities such as community shops and allotments, green schemes, wildlife surveys, outdoor classrooms, history archives, art events and support for local producers.

To find out more about SDF visit the Blackdown Hills AONB website at www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk or call 01823 680681.

Workshops to help fund applications

GRANT scheme Making It Local is holding two funding workshops this month in the Blackdown Hills.

Both workshops cover the application process and funding advice. They will also include a presentation by a successful local project.

The workshops will be held on Tuesday, June 7th at Dukeswell Village Hall and Tuesday, June 14th at East Devon Business Centre in Honiton at 10am.

Places are limited so contact Making It Local by emailing makingitlocal@devon.gov.uk to book a place.

MP is set to open community's fete

BLAGDON Hill Village Fete will be held at the Sellick's Green Playing Field on Saturday, June 11th.

The event will be officially opened by Jeremy Browne MP at 2pm.

There will be two youth bands performing, all the usual popular stalls, human table football, bouncy castle, magician and children's' races.

The fete is a community event for all ages giving an opportunity for all those in the parish to come together and enjoy a afternoon of fun.

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MP begins week in sin bin as due to inquiry

By LUCIE SIMIC

blackdown@tindlenews.co.uk

MP David Laws will begin his seven-day spell in the sin bin on Tuesday, June 7th, according to the House of Commons Information Office.

His suspension from the House of Commons is for seven sitting days and comes as a result of the inquiry into his parliamentary expenses.

The House of Commons Committee on Standards and Privileges, and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards concluded that Mr Laws broke a number of House of Commons rules by paying rent to a partner and misdesignating his main home.

The findings were announced last week and the punishment was confirmed on Monday, May 16th.

But it was also concluded that his motivation was privacy and not financial gain, and that the effect of his decisions was to claim less money from expenses than would otherwise have been the case.

Commenting on the outcome of the inquiry, Mr Laws said on Thursday May 12th: "I accept the conclusions of the Parliamentary Commissioner and the

House of Commons committee.

"I apologise for the rules I have broken, but I am very pleased indeed that the inquiry has concluded that my motivation was privacy and not financial gain, and that the taxpayer was the beneficiary of my desire to keep my private life private.

"The last year has been a very difficult one, and I am pleased that this whole inquiry is now over.

"I accept that I was wrong to try to keep my private circumstances private, and I apologise for this.

"However, I hope that everyone will now accept that I did not do this to increase my claims, and indeed seeking to keep my life private in this way saved the taxpayer money.

"I am very grateful to my constituency party in Yeovil, which has stood by me during this horrible year of my life.

"I am also particularly grateful to the people of Yeovil Constituency, who have overwhelmingly treated me with kindness, generosity and understanding.

"I now intend to get on with my job of being local MP, and supporting the government in its attempts to sort out the economic mess and make Britain a freer and fairer place in which to live."



◆ RHYLIE Griffiths, five, and Evie Kenny, three, both from Hemyock, collect eggs at Beech Hayes Farm

Spring baby love for kids

THE sun shone on Beech Hayes Farm in the Blackdown Hills recently as children enjoyed a special visit to see the spring babies.

Farmers Nick and Ruth Strange welcomed under-fives and their families to their traditional, mixed farm just outside Churchinford.

The visitors met chicks, piglets, calves and new-born lambs, and helped to collect eggs from the farm's chickens, ducks and geese.

The event was organised by the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty team as part of a year-round programme of countryside events.

ASSEMBLIES at Hemyock School have just become a little different.

Over 140 children were enthralled by the first weekly presentation by members of the Open the Book team.

Drawn from local churches, Open the Book volunteers present a programme of themed and dramatised Bible stories, using drama, mime, props, costume — even the children and staff themselves — to present Bible stories in ways that are lively, engaging and informative.

Head of teaching and learning Leanne Arrowsmith said: "Using the Open the Book programme in our collective worship will enable us to discover all the wonder and wisdom that the Bible can offer and it will be great fun for everyone involved!"

Team leader Reverend Steven Reed, of Hemyock Baptist Church, said: "The volunteers represent churches from across the Upper Culm area including Methodists, Anglicans, Evangelicals and Baptists.

"They have a breadth of bible knowledge which they will enthusiastically deliver through the Open the Book weekly presentations using the well known bible stories including Adam and Eve, Noah, David, the life of Jesus and the stories of the New Testament."

Assemblies open up



◆ LEANNE Arrowsmith receives a copy of the Lion Story Teller Bible from Reverend Steven Reed and the Open the Book team at the first of their presentations

Rose legends to find on manor house garden visit

THE Yarty Gardening Club, based in and around Bishopwood and Buckland St Mary, has some great garden visits on its programme this year.

Elworthy Cottage Garden, near Taunton, and Springdale at Smeatharpe, are followed by Cothay Manor, Greenham, Wellington, on Thursday, June 16th.

Members and visitors should make their own way there, following the brown signs off the A38 Wellington and Exeter road. Entry to the

garden is £7 and teas will be available.

The romance of Cothay lies in part in its great age, and the atmosphere that surrounds it.

Legend has it that to celebrate the end of the Wars of the Roses, a red and a white rose were planted on the terrace by Richard Bluet, the then lord of the manor, who enlarged Cothay in the 15th Century.

The legend continues for you can still see the red rose of Lancaster, and the white rose of

York, flowering today.

Twelve acres of magical gardens surround the manor.

Many garden rooms, each a garden in itself, are set off a 200 yards yew walk. In addition there is a bog garden with azaleas and drifts of primuli, fine trees, cottage garden, courtyards, and a river walk.

A plantsman's paradise. The gardens have achieved the highest accolade of two stars in the Good Garden Guide.

Easy listening for kids with donation

UPOTTERY Pre-school can now have story time anytime after Honiton Lions donated an easy-listener CD player recently.

Brian Richards, the chairman of Honiton Lions, and other Lion members came to visit the pre-school and see the new CD player in action. It has six headphones attached, so now numerous children can listen to stories and music anytime without disturbing the play of others.

Upottery Pre-school, which runs every morning and all day Wednesday and Friday, is a friendly, well established group which provides education and care for children below school age who live in Upottery and the surrounding area. The pre-school also has the closest of links with Upottery Primary School next door, which is why the easy-listener is a fantastic resource for early language and reading skills.

Archiving facility

HEMYOCK now has an archiving facility for the Blackdown Hills and Culm Valley, to preserve old photos and paintings of the locality, on a database.

Anyone who may have anything of interest and would like to share should contact 01278 433499 or 01823 680175. Items can then be scanned in and returned to their owners.

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A View from the Blackdowns



PHOTO BY LUCIE SIMIC

◆ A HAZY view over Smallridge, near Axminster

Do you have a photo of a View from the Blackdowns? Email it to blackdown@tindlenews.co.uk

Village school's future threatened by closure

By **ANDERS LARSSON**
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NO decision has been taken — but the future of a local primary school looks decidedly bleak.

Devon County Council has launched a public consultation on a proposal to shut down Dalwood Primary School, which currently has 12 pupils on roll.

Four of these are set to leave for secondary school at the end of the 2010-11 academic year, and pupil numbers are not expected to improve.

As a result, the school could close at the end of this year.

The problem of low pupil numbers is not a new one and attempts to find a solution have been made.

Plans to form a federation with Membury Primary School were announced last year, but were unsuccessful.

According to the local education authority, Devon County Council (DCC), the governing body has concluded that closing the school is in the best interests of the children.

But DCC stresses that no decision has been taken.

A DCC spokesperson said: "No decision has been taken to close the school.

"The governors and DCC are consulting on that possibility.

"If, at the end of the consultation period, a decision is taken that closure is the best option then a public notice will be issued and people have six weeks to make

further representations.

"Then the matter will be debated by DCC. If the school were to close, it is likely it would be at the end of the calendar year.

"In any consultation of this nature we obviously want to hear from as many people as possible - parents, governors, staff and the wider village community."

All these groups were invited to an information session at the school on Friday, May 6th.

Consultation material stated: "The school has physical capacity to take up to 49

pupils and has been operating with a high level of surplus places for some years.

This situation is not forecast to improve.

"Delivering a full and balanced curriculum and the ability to fulfil age-related expectations is difficult with such a small and decreasing number of children.

"DCC and the governing body's primary concern is that pupils receive the best possible education and learning opportunities.

"To achieve this the governing body has explored alternatives such as federating with another school but this has not materialised.

"With regret, it has concluded that closing the school is in the best interests of the children. We would like to hear your views on this proposal by 5pm on Tuesday June 14th."

Responses can be sent to schoolconsultations@devon.gov.uk.

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CULM HEAD	Holman Clavel
CULMSTOCK	Strand Store
DALWOOD	PO
DUNKESWELL	Spar School of Flying Air Centre Lake View Manor Highfield Garage MST Auctioneers Royal Oak
HEMYOCK	Catherine Wheel Ivy Cafe, Brook House Post Office & Stores Halifax Building Society Brookridge Timber Doctors Surgery Spar Blackdown Hills AONB Office
HONITON	TIC Slades Countrywise Town Council New St Newsagents Stags Estate Agents
HOWLEY ILMINSTER	Howley Tavern Rose Mill Feeds Dillington House Meeting House
KENTISBEARE KILMINGTON	PO PO Old Inn Millers Farm Shop Offwell Stores Windmill Garage
OFFWELL	PO Six Bells Golden Pet Supplies Farm Shop King's Arms
PAYHEMBURY	The Greyhound TIC
ROCKWELL GREEN	TIC District Council Post Office Village Shop
SMEATHARPE STOCKLAND	Coldharbour Mill Best One Store Co-op
STAPLE FITZPANE TAUNTON	The Haymaker Barleymows Farm Shop Ferrie Animal Sanctuary
TIVERTON	Pub The Old Well TIC Webbers
TRULL	Blackdown Garden Centre Willowbrook Nursery
UFFCULME	Blackbird Inn Farmers Inn The Belfry
WADEFORD WAMBROOK	
WATERLOO CROSS	
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WEST BUCKLAND	
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A View from the clubs

Hat-trick for Phyllis at society show

DUNKESWELL Garden Society held its annual spring show at the Throgmorton Hall in April.

Despite the fact that the daffodils had bloomed slightly earlier this year, there was still an excellent array of flowers for the visitors to admire.

Also on show this year was an art exhibition by Dunkeswell Art Group which included a varied display of different styles of work. Overall it was a very successful show with the highest number of visitors for many years.

The Reverend Nicholas Wall and his wife, Marguerite, had been invited to present the prizes before they leave Dunkeswell to enjoy their retirement.

In the Young People's section, for those aged between five and eight, the joint-winners were brother and sister Victoria and Steven Tomlinson. Chloe Keitch won the section for nine to 12-year-olds. As usual the pre-school had entered some lovely work, this year the theme was flower collages. Mason Ingledew, three, was judged the best entry.

Charlotte Tomlinson won the Highfield Cup for the best bowl of plants. Hilary Morris won the Highfield Plate for the Floral Art



◆ **PHYLLIS Gunningham receiving the new Hillview Nursery Challenge Cup from Nick and Marguerite Wall**

section and Ray Shimell the Highfield Tankard for the men only category. The Dunkeswell Challenge Cup went to Di Eames for the Handicrafts section.

Two new trophies had been

donated to the garden society. The Spring Show Bowl for the overall winner in the cut flowers and the Hillview Nursery Challenge Cup for the person with the highest number of points in the show. Both of these

were won by Phyllis Gunningham.

She completed a hat-trick by also winning the Highfield Challenge Bowl for her beautiful deep red Pelargonium which was judged Best in Show.

Serviceman chat at lunch

ON Wednesday March 16th, the frugal Lenten Community Lunch, consisting of soup and bread, took place in the Jubilee Hall, Yacombe.

Michelle Button-Stephens and Pat Bright had cooked the broth and vegetable soups and there was plenty for second helpings.

After the meal, Lesley Sutton introduced Mark Graves — a veteran of the Devon and Dorset Regiment — who represented the charity Talking 2 Minds.

This charity has been set up to help everyone, not only servicemen suffering from post traumatic stress disorder.

Volunteers are trained by master

practitioners who help to cure the behaviour that memories cause. So much is heard about Help for Heroes dealing with the horrendous physical injuries which occur in such places as Afghanistan, Iraq and other war-torn countries, but often those who are mentally scarred have been forgotten.

Many ex-servicemen, policemen, firemen and ambulance and nursing staff are haunted by dreadful occurrences which need to be erased.

This makes it difficult for those affected to get jobs when they are discharged. The proceeds from the lunch together with a donation has been sent to Talking 2 Minds to assist in its work.

Food recipes for thought

AT the March meeting of Awliscombe Women's Institute Paula Grant, of Axminster, was introduced who gave the group some amusing stories about when she started outside catering and buying a hog roast machine and trading under Piggin' Good Catering.

She brought along samples of her recipes and members had a taste of the goodies. Jill Leonard gave the vote of thanks.

Many coach trips have been organised, including ten-pin bowling in Exeter. Many members are going to the spring council

meeting at Torquay where the celebrity speaker is Adam Hensom — the popular Countryfile farmer.

Many birthday cards were given out and a basket of flowers for a special birthday. The winner of the competition for six homemade sweets was Mary Martin and the flower of the month winner was Irene Maynard with a lovely pink hyacinth.

The raffle was won by Daphne Carpenter. Julie Spiller organised a quiz guessing the names of flower pictures. Tea hostesses were Sarah Abbott, Pam Chown, Margaret Dymond and Marion Ellett.

New photographic equipment used for Vietnam talk

TUESDAY Club members in Yacombe took advantage of the new screen and equipment to show photographs.

The equipment is owned by the parish council, and was used for the

monthly meeting in the Jubilee Hall in March, when Pat Bright kindly stood in for the advertised talk and told everyone about her recent trip to Vietnam.

This country has survived

appalling troubles and reinvented itself as a holiday destination.

She was thanked by Mary Smith who also provided the refreshments.

Shirley Briant as co-ordinator of the group introduced a few matters of

business and Joan Ewins gave details of the proposed trip to Sherborne and Minterne Gardens.

Thank you to Matthew Tomkinson who kindly helped set up the equipment.

Send your club news and reports by email to blackdown@tindlenews.co.uk



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countrysceneextra

Written by countryside
correspondent
TONY JACKSON



Readers' letters are pouring in!

APRIL has seen some astonishing rarities turning up on the Axe Estuary marshes. A great white heron was seen on the Seaton Marshes lagoon on the 19th, a purple heron was spotted at the Colyford Common hide on the 23rd and, last but not least, a white stork was also seen at Colyford Common three days later.

All these birds were photographed by Steve Waite, Sue Smith and Karen Woolley and illustrated in the twice-monthly newsletter organised by David Walters. Contact him on 01297 552616 if you'd like to go on his emailing list.

Now, who has heard a cuckoo? Not me, sadly, though Bob Oliver from Aylesbeare heard one calling on April 21st, whilst a friend told me that he had heard more than one cuckoo calling near Morton in West Dorset. It is so sad to realise that

these birds, once considered the regular harbingers of spring, are now almost a rarity.

However, my swallows are back and seem to be titivating a last year's nest, rather than build a new one, possibly because mud is in short supply. It has been encouraging, however, to see good numbers of orange-tip butterflies, the odd holly blue and speckled wood, though I have yet to spot a tortoiseshell, while brimstones seem to have been remarkably scarce.

■ ONE of the most archetypal sights of the summer is that of swifts scything their way through sky on long scimitar-shaped wings and screaming near their nest sites as they swoop back and forth high in the air.

Yet again, numbers have dwindled due, it is believed, to an ever increasing lack of suitable nesting habitats. Old buildings provide the best nesting sites, especially in

towns. A sociable bird, small parties love to wheel and soar while catching insects.

Swifts, which winter in Southern Africa, arrive here in late April, and at once set about finding suitable nesting holes where they can lay three eggs, rear rear young and then depart at the end of July. It is a remarkable fact that the bird appears to remain constantly on the wing, for its short, feathered legs and toes are useless for walking, and it is even believed that it sleeps and mates on the wing.

Planners, developers and home owners in swift "hot spots" are being urged to ensure that suitable nesting sites are incorporated into buildings. A wide variety of nesting boxes, ranging from plywood to woodcrete is available and should be installed on the side of a building that gets least sunshine and under an overhang or the eaves. The box must be sited at least five metre above the

ground and with clear access.

Whilst it can take some time for swifts to discover newly installed nesting boxes, you can speed up the process by playing a CD containing the bird's calls from early in the nesting season and in the latter part of July when juveniles are seeking nesting sites for next year. For further information go to www.swift-conservation.org.

Incidentally, swifts do not belong to the same family as swallows and martins. The former is the family Cypselidae, the latter Hirundinidae. ■ READERS' letters are pouring in, so I must be doing something right! Mr M Hodson tells me that he saw his first swallow on March 22nd and then had to wait until April 10th to spot the next bird.

His pond, however, is heaving with newts, frogs and toads. The first toad spawned on February 21st while a late comer waited until the middle of April. This latter toad produced

spawn with eggs in a wider string than normal, and offset in a double row. Could this be a natterjack, he asks? It is possible, as this toad breeds much later than the common toad and the egg strings are also shorter and distinctive.

The natterjack is smaller than the toad with a maximum length of head and body of three inches, and a yellow line running down the centre of the head and back. Another name for it is the running toad as it does not hop, but runs a short distance, stops and then carries on, a gait resulting from its short legs.

Mr Hodson also tells me that he has a pair of song thrushes in his garden with young, and plenty of greenfinches and chaffinches. There is also a sparrowhawk which takes the occasional pigeon. All of which confirms my opinion that Seaton is a Mecca for bird life.

Still on bird life, Brian Vaughton, who lives in east Devon, wonders what has happened to his blue tits? For the past 18 years he has fed a small flock of these birds but suddenly they have all vanished with the exception of one tit, a single bird which is feeding young in a nest-box without the help of a mate.

Why have they disappeared asks my correspondent and, more important, will they return? He wonders whether they have been killed by a toxic batch of bird seed or peanuts but has discovered that a lady living a short distance away has experienced the same phenomenon so this explanation seems unlikely.

Frankly, this is a puzzle and there is no ready explanation. One could blame a sparrowhawk for the odd

kill but not a mass disappearance. He does not say how many blue-tits are involved but at this time of the year they should all be nesting and rearing young. Could it simply be that the birds have deserted the feeder while attending domestic duties elsewhere? One would have thought, however, that they would still appear for food. A puzzle. Has any other reader encountered this?

My recent mention of big cats in the area has brought a letter from Ian Rangeley who had an astonishingly close encounter with a big cat a few years ago. Attending a funeral with his wife and two neighbours at a small village near Milton Keynes, they had just arrived at the church when, three metres away, a large adult puma walked lazily along the grass verge! They sensibly stayed in the car until it had padded out of sight. The animal walked along the bank of the Grand Union Canal, peered at some sheep and then vanished into woodland.

I notice that young plants of the wretched Himalayan balsam are beginning to appear under the hedgerows in adjacent fields. This year I am going to try and rip out every single one to try and prevent the spread of this colourful but dominating plant which has no place in our countryside.

To contact Tony Jackson, write to: Country Scene, South Street, Axminster, Devon EX13 5AD or by email to: wardjackson@tiscali.co.uk

The views expressed are those of the columnist and not necessarily of the newspaper.

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bhba Blackdown Hills Business Association

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BHBA SUMMER SOCIAL

at Otter Brewery
In the Green Shed!

On Wednesday, 8th June 2011

Time: 6 for 6.30 finishing at 8.30pm

Local businesses are invited to our summer social at Otter Brewery which will include a tour of the brewery, followed by beer sampling, barbecue and networking!

Cost (member rate): £17.50 includes food and drink.

Space is limited, so pre-booking is essential.

Please contact Val Baker

BHBA, St Ivel House, Station Road, Hemyock, Cullompton,
Devon EX15 3SJ Tel 01823 681484

info@bhba.org.uk

www.bhba.org.uk

For local products & services visit www.blackdown-hills.co.uk



The organisers of the Blackdown Hills Woodland Fair are promising that this summer's event will be bigger and better than ever.

The fair, which takes place at Park Farm near Wellington on 2nd July, is a celebration of all things woody.

Activities and displays will go on throughout the day, with demonstrations including wood carving and furniture making, tree surgery and climbing, fire lighting, chainsaw carving, horse logging, saws and machinery, bow and hurdle making, willow work, and lots more.

In the woodland experience area, children can learn new outdoor skills and follow a special sculpture trail.

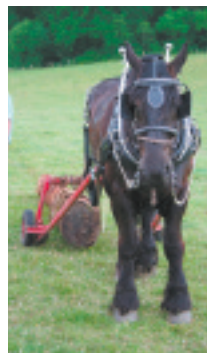
Wood products will be on offer from a wide range of stalls, from small craft stands to log cabins.

Local food and drink, including cider, apple juice, wood-fired pizzas, fresh bread, fresh meat, ice cream, and tea and cakes, will be available all day.

The fair is organised by the Blackdown and East Devon Woodland Association and the Silvanus Trust. Host John Greenshields says:

"There was so much posi-

Blackdown Hills Woodland Fair 2011 the biggest yet



tive feedback from families last year, we had to do it again. One family said they only came for an hour but stayed all day!"

The Blackdown Hills Woodland Fair is open to the public from 10am. Under 16s get in free, while entry for adults costs £5 per person. There is free car parking and the fair will be signed on all major roads.



30th May
Bank Holiday Monday

ADMISSION
Adults £2
Children under 16 FREE!

stockland fair Starts 1.30pm
Stockland Village, 6 miles equidistant Honiton, Chard & Axminster.

Fun for all ages!

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Fancy Dress Competition...
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Bar...Teas...Hot Snacks...Ices...
Stockland Eggathon Competition...
Events may be subject to change

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For more details:

Ruth and Nick Strange
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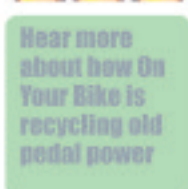
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www.sustainabilityshow.org.uk

WHAT'S ON

In the Blackdown Hills
this summer

Show to be opened by Hugh



What's green, combines cider, bee-keeping and electric cars and happens in Taunton? It must be the West Country's first-ever Sustainability Show on Sunday, June 19th at the Queen's Conference Centre in Taunton. Guest of honour Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall will perform the opening ceremony and sign copies of his books afterwards.

Entry to the show and parking are free and visitors will find over 80 exhibitors ranging from Nissan's brand-new Leaf saloon to demonstrations of willow-weaving and bee-keeping. Younger children will love the chance to see lambs, ducks and chickens up close.

"I've been delighted and enthused to see such a range of companies and organisations wanting to take part in the show," said organiser Simon Ross. "There will be something for everyone; from growing your own food to learning about renewable energy sources."

"Children will find lots of hands-on activities and demonstrations since as every parent knows they're our environmental conscience!"

Acclaimed folk/rock band Elephant Talk will provide the live music in an entertainment area adjoining the stage - plus real ale from Cotleigh Brewery and cider from Tricky's of Churchinford. Food - Tech students from Queen's College will be using their new wood-fired mud-brick oven to produce pizzas galore, plus up to 10 more food and ice-cream stands.

All in all it adds up to an entertaining, educational and inspiring day out. Show open from 10.00am - 4.00pm.

For more information please visit www.sustainabilityshow.org.uk.



Diary dates

**Saturday, 4th June from
6pm 'til late**

A GREEN CELEBRATION at Mackarness Hall, Honiton. Thank you to everyone who voted Green in East Devon in the recent elections. Come along and share in our celebration with our two new Green Councillors! All the family are welcome, entertainment includes local bands. £2 donation on the door. Bar including local ales etc. East Devon Green Party - Telephone: 07740 973 990.

Saturday, 18th June

ABBNEY PRE-SCHOOL are holding a Summer Fair at Abbey Manor Community Centre, Abbey Manor Park, Yeovil, Somerset from 2pm-4pm. There will be refreshments, games, cake stall, penalty shoot-out, toy and book stalls, face painting, prize raffle, professional stall holders i.e. pampered chef etc. and lots more. The fair is being held in aid of 'Abbey Pre-School's proposed move to a permanent site'.



FREE Leisure Review Diary Dates listing form

Date
Event
Time
Venue
Town/Village
Organised by Tel no

Send your Diary Dates to:

View from the Blackdown Hills, Tindle House, South Street, Axminster, Devon EX13 5AD or email blackdown@tindlenews.co.uk.

Please note: This is a free service and whilst we endeavour to include all entries, we cannot guarantee all listings submitted will be published. Please use one form per event.

WE ARE UNABLE TO TAKE DIARY DATES LISTINGS OR QUERIES OVER THE PHONE
Deadline for Diary Dates entries is on Fridays at 12 noon



Beech Hayes - top quality traditional produce

Beech Hayes Farm is located in Churchinford, Somerset, tucked away in the area of outstanding natural beauty.

The Blackdown Hills. Ruth and Nick Strange run their mixed livestock farm to produce top quality traditional produce.

This ranges from their reared Gloucester Old Spot Pork and Free Range Pork, to their scrumptious sausages, bacon and ham.

The Native Breed Beef are used to produce burgers with a delicious flavour and texture but the quality produce does not stop there.

Rearing their own free range sweet and delicious lamb, not forgetting the barn reared table chickens, and free range hens eggs, duck and goose eggs and Christmas poultry in season.

If you haven't had one of their birds before you don't know just how good Turkey can be.

At Beech Hayes Farm,

Churchinford, Nick and Ruth Strange run several farm orientated courses and other animal husbandry courses throughout the year, from Pig Keeping to calf rearing, even growing your own Christmas dinner! The several courses are designed for both beginners and more experienced, but also inviting those who want to get their hands dirty!

Nick and Ruth also attend several Farmers Markets. Running for over 10 years, these markets help to guarantee the future of the farming industry by supporting local producers such as Beech Hayes.

These include: every Thursday at the Taunton Farmers Market, Honiton Country Market (on the 1st and 3rd Friday of every month) and the Bridgwater market (on 2nd Friday of the month.) Visit these markets to witness the wide variety of fresh, high quality and locally produced on offer from Beech Hayes and other local producers.



17th Axe Vale Festival on its way

Axminster Showground will once more host the Axe Vale Festival on Saturday 25th & Sunday 26th June 2011. Off the Trafalgar Way the 17th Festival with its 2 free car parks will once more have many of its old attractions while introducing many new ones.

This year exhibitors will be coming from afar as Cheshire, Staffordshire & Cambridgeshire.

Plenty for the children to do with the Big Bubble, Swing boats, Axe Valley Birds, a Magician for both children and parents, and a visit to the Toys & Hobbies will find Buffers Miniature Railway amongst other attractions. There is a Crèche for the under 6s with qualified staff.

Visit the many Marquees such as Floral with its outstanding display of blooms by award winning exhibitors, call in at the Food Hall with its large selection of products many locally sourced.

A visit to Craft is a must with its fine quality goods

and 13 new exhibitors.

Among the many items are Alpaca garments, Goats milk products, fine Jewellery, Stoneware. Art with work by local artists.

Need to rest a while then the arena with its large seating area is a must, watch the Terrier racing, Falconry display or just sit and listen to the Axe Valley Choir sing old favourites such as "When I fall in love", or tap your feet to the "One Night Stand" band. Hungry, Refreshments are available as well as a licensed bar.

Demonstrations will take place around the Showground, take a look at the antiques and collectables with its many artefacts. Visit the Horticultural Show with its variety of classes, Spirit of the Community brings Axminster town to the showground.

Don't forget the Shopping Mall with its diversity of goods for home & garden, Nurseries with their top quality plants.



Admission Adults £7.00 (advance £5.50)
Under 16 £2.00 (£1.50) under 5s free.

Advance tickets maybe purchased at local TICs or from the Archway Bookshop, and Mole Avon, Axminster

Mobility Scooters available pre-book on 01297 560651

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raising funds for local organisations

AXMINSTER

Saturday 25th & Sunday 26th June 2011



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Arena Events, Children's Entertainment
Spirit of the Community
Refreshments & Licensed Bar

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Free entry - DONATION IF DESIRED TO

MacMillan





Blackdown Hills Business Association

Invites local businesses to its SUMMER SOCIAL in the Green Shed at Otter Brewery, on Wednesday, 8 June 2011. 6 for 6.30pm private tour, followed by supper and beer sampling! £17.50 BHBA member rate, pre-booking is essential.

The Blackdown Hills Business Association (BHBA) is delighted to invite local businesses to its summer social in the Green Shed at Otter Brewery on Wednesday, 8 June 2011. 6 for 6.30pm brewery tour, followed by barbecue, beer sampling and networking!

Val Baker at the BHBA said 'Otter Brewery is an exemplar Blackdown Hills business picking up numerous awards for its quality beers and excellent environmental credentials. Otter Brewery undoubtedly makes a significant contribution to our local economy and as one of our founding members, we are delighted that Otter Brewery continues to support the work of the BHBA.

Patrick McCaig said 'We are lucky enough to be located in the heart of the Blackdown Hills – an area of outstanding natural beauty and also an area of special scientific interest. With this in mind, we have always felt a responsibility for our environment and not only do we have a number of initiatives that we operate already, we also have more in the pipeline for the future.'

Join us on a private tour of the Brewery with Patrick McCaig; sample the award-winning beer and network with fellow businesses!

If you would like to join us, please contact: Val Baker (BHBA) Tel 01823 681484 or info@bhba.org.uk Mobile 07711366885

Blackdown Hills Business Association (BHBA), St Ivel House, Station Road, Hemyock, Cullompton EX15 3SJ www.bhba.org.uk

To source local products and services, please visit the Blackdown Hills Directory at www.blackdown-hills.co.uk.

Honiton Show set for a great year

The 121st Honiton Agricultural Show takes place on Thursday 4th August 2011. The Grand Parade will take centre stage amongst the main ring activities where the day's prize winners will proudly parade giving the viewing public a wonderful opportunity to see the beautifully turned out exhibits including Alpacas, Cattle and Sheep.

The main ring is delighted to announce the return of the Bolddog "Lings" Freestyle Team, Honda's official and the UK's number 1 motorcycle display team! Cyril the Squirrel and his Racing Terriers will be performing and are one of the country's leading terrier display teams. These fantastic little dogs will keep you all entertained with their crazy antics.

Members of the public are encouraged to participate with their own dogs and children can join in the fun and race against these speedy little terriers! Again Honiton will host the West of England Hound Show a show within a show which has a huge following

and forms a part of the lower field countryside activities. The Blacksmiths Guild will demonstrate their expertise and compete against each other during the day.

The vintage tractors can also be found in this area where nearly 100 vehicles are on display. There is a wonderful poultry and dog show consisting of both Pedigree classes and fun classes for the family pet. With over 400 trade stands, including a Craft marquee and a Food Hall bursting with over forty exhibitors and locally sourced public caterers there really is something for everyone. Honiton has a unique atmosphere it brings new and traditional agriculture together so make a note in your diary as the organisers look forward to welcoming you. Don't forget accompanied under 16's go free. Make savings and purchase advance admission tickets now for only £11.50 per adult. For further details on the show contact the secretary on 01404 41794 or visit the website www.honitonshow.co.uk.



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All hail the Royals

As this summer staple comes into season, we look at what you can do to make potato dishes more exciting.

Whether you prefer your potatoes boiled and finished off with butter or crushed and transformed into fishcakes, national prizes dictates it's time to start buying those sweet Jersey Royals.

In season from the beginning of April to the end of June, these English potatoes are definitely in a class of their own.

Here are six recipes to whet your Royal appetite...

Honey-roasted Jersey Royals with yoghurt and mint shoulder of lamb (Serves 6)

1 x 2.5kg shoulder of lamb on the bone

For the marinade:

200ml natural yoghurt

1tsp cumin seeds (roasted and crushed)

1tsp white peppercorns (roasted and crushed)

2tsp salt

1tsp white wine vinegar
50g mint
50g basil
Small pinch of fresh thyme

For the honey roast Jersey Royals:

600g Jersey Royal new potatoes

1tbsp Jersey honey

2tbsp vegetable oil

20g unsalted butter

Handful fresh thyme

Salt and pepper

For the lamb:

Place all the marinade ingredients into a food processor and blend for 30 seconds or so until a paste is achieved. Coat the lamb with the marinade and leave for 18 to 24 hours. Preheat the barbecue using the indirect method - only cover 180 degrees of the barbecue with charcoal, light it and allow it to burn until the charcoal turns white. This should take half an hour or so. Then place the shoulder of lamb over the part of the barbecue with no charcoal and cover the barbecue with

a lid. As it takes 3 hours to cook you need to feed a little bit of charcoal every now and then just to keep the fire going, but try and keep the inside temperature at around 95C. After three hours it should flake off the bone.

For the potatoes:

Wash the Jersey Royals, place them in a saucepan and cover with cold water. Add a little salt, bring them to the boil and simmer until they are just cooked (about 20 minutes), drain and allow them to cool slightly.

Meanwhile, pour the oil in a roasting tin and place in a preheated oven (190C/Gas Mark 5). When the oil is smoking hot add the Jersey Royals, season with salt and pepper and roast for 20 minutes until a little colour has been achieved.

Add the butter, honey and thyme and roast for a further 10 minutes until they have slightly caramelised - they're now ready to serve.



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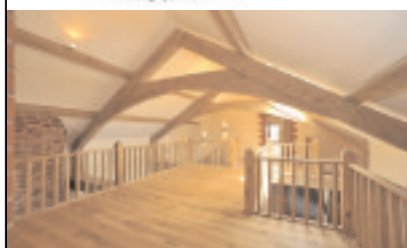
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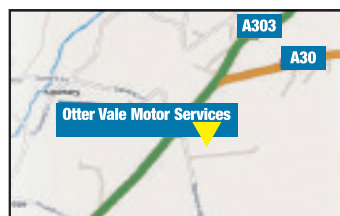
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Refined generation



WITH BMW and Mercedes, buyers seeking a compact, premium-level roadster have been well catered for in recent years. The latter has historically approached the market from the comfort end of the scale, with BMW only recently choosing to tone down a previously more overtly sporting proposition.

The SLK has done a sterling job for Mercedes. When it first launched in 1996 the car debuted a folding metal roof, offering owners the best of both worlds - tin-top refinement and security when you wanted it and open air convenience when it took your fancy.

By the second generation the car boasted sharper handling to please those seeking a sportier premium compact roadster experience. With this third generation SLK, Mercedes has further refined the driving experience and added a few welcome extra bits of technology.

Style-wise the car offers buyers two choices. The basic SLK shape remains intact, albeit a little sharper and better defined than previously. Opting for the 'Sport' model results in the addition of a tastefully subtle but visually appealing AMG-branded bodykit and wheels plus a more focused sports suspension set-up.

Even in the world of sports cars it's hard to escape talk of cutting fuel consumption and emissions. With the inclusion of an improved engine range, this SLK follows other recent Mercedes products in delivering greater savings but, impressively, not at the expense of outright performance.

The SLK line-up consists of a turbo four-cylinder in 184 and 204 horsepower guise in SLK 200 and 250 trim respectively. There's also a six-cylinder unit boasting 306 horsepower. Four-pot models come with a six-speed manual gearbox as standard, with the 350 getting a seven-speed auto - optional on the other cars.

For those watching their pennies, the SLK 200 returns an impressive 43.5mpg in auto trim (41.5mpg manual) and CO2 emissions are 151 and 158g/km respectively. The 250 variant isn't far behind, while the 350 ducks under 40mpg and posts a creditable 167g/km CO2 figure. There's even an engine stop-start function for good measure plus an eco driving mode that softens the throttle and auto gearbox response.

As you can see, there's no longer downside to



downsizing. And on the road the 200 is a keen and willing companion. Even in non Sport guise the car feels poised on challenging, twisty roads. The manual gearshift is slick and accurate, while the car's steering is direct and weights up in a predictable manner. Sport models take this a step further, but thankfully there's no real compromise in ride quality. You can switch between suspension and (where fitted) auto gearbox modes, and the car's tuned ride and 18-inch AMG wheels help, not hinder, the experience.

With each step up in engine output the experience takes another positive leap forward, with the 350 predictably offering the most thrills. However, in a testament to the rounded nature of the 200, it's a car-engine combination you dismiss at your peril.

No modern Mercedes would be complete without a raft of safety kit and this third-gen SLK doesn't disappoint. Inheriting technology from more expensive cars such as the S-Class and CLS, the usual stability control systems have been enhanced with the (sometimes optional) inclusion of auto braking, lane departure warning, speed road sign detection and auto dipping headlights.

On the fun side there's a new infotainment system offering Internet access, an active wind deflector plus changes to the car's trademark folding metal roof. The basic version remains, offering coupe-like refinement and security when raised. There's now the option of a glass panoramic roof plus a new 'Magic Sky Control' branded alternative. Fancy name aside, occupants can switch electronically between a light and dark mode, thanks to the clever technology in the glass.

There's little doubt that, with this third-gen SLK, Mercedes has hit the sweet spot when it comes to compact, premium convertibles. The car's styling strikes the right balance between elegance and a hint of performance, while mechanically it's economical, enjoyable and refined in equal measure.

Factor in the improved safety and comfort technology - not forgetting the car's trademark roof - and it's likely that prospective customers will need little persuasion to sign on the dotted line. But if that isn't enough for some, the promise of a diesel version just around the corner should open up the market to a whole new buyer profile.

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